

ARIZONA BIRD HIGHLIGHTS, FALL 2025

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A notable feature of the fall 2025 season (1 August to 30 November) was the significant movement of jays, woodpeckers, and several other high-elevation birds into the lowlands. This note will describe this, as well as other fall highlights. Reports are from eBird unless otherwise noted (eBird 2025). Some of the Arizona Bird Committee (ABC) review species have yet to be voted on by the ABC, and where reports of review-list species have not yet been submitted, observers are encouraged to do so. The common and scientific names of bird species follow the nomenclature of the American Ornithological Society.

Eleven Fulvous Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), an unusually large group for Arizona, showed up at ponds in Gilbert at the intersection of Higley and Ocotillo roads, Maricopa County, 29 November into December (Figure 1). Twelve Ross's Geese (*Anser rossii*) in 3 counties (Cochise, La Paz, and Maricopa) were more than the 7 reported in 4 counties in the fall of 2024. Three Eurasian Wigeons (*Mareca penelope*), a rare migrant and winter visitor, were reported, 1 each at a pond in Star Valley, Gila County, 12 October; Bellair Golf Club in the Phoenix area, Maricopa County, 20 November into December; and Cibola National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), La Paz County, 28 November. The Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) winters regularly in the state and is most common in the Lower Colorado River Valley. Up to 65 were reported beginning 3 November and through the month on Lake Havasu at the Bill Williams River NWR, La Paz/Mohave counties. Up to 2 were observed at Lake Pleasant, Yavapai/Maricopa counties, 6 to 11 November; 1 was at the Marana Water Reclamation Facility, Pima County, 11 November; and in Yavapai County 2 were at Willow Lake, 11 November, and 1 was at Watson Lake, 13 to 19 November. One each were reported at Canyon Lake, Maricopa County, 21 November, and Amado Water Treatment Plant (WTP), Pima County, 30 November. All North American scoter species were reported—single Surf Scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*) at Lake Pleasant, 23 October to 11 November and Arivaca Lake, Pima County, 16 November. Three White-winged Scoters (*M. deglandi*) were at a Gila River flood basin near Florence, Pinal County, 10 November, a record high for the county. A state high record of 3 Black Scoters (*M. americana*) was at Lake Havasu City, Mohave County, 6 November. Single birds were reported at Lake Pleasant, 6 to 12 November (Figure 2), and Leupp Sewage Treatment Plant, Coconino County, 13 November. A Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) was at Canyon Lake from 18 November into December.



Figure 1. Fulvous Whistling-Ducks. Part of a group of 11, Gilbert, Maricopa County, 29 November 2025. Photo by Pierre Deviche

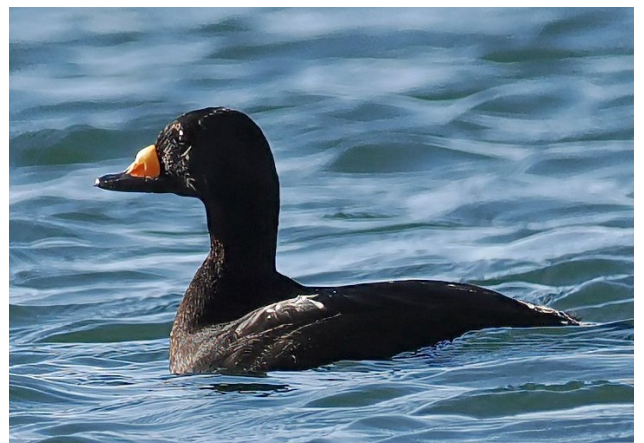


Figure 2. Black Scoter. Lake Pleasant, Gila County, 25 November 2025. Photo by Carol Hippenmeyer

A single Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) continued from the summer until 29 October at El Rio Open Space, Marana, Pima County. Eleven Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*) were reported from 2 counties: 3 were from Maricopa

County 1 each at Glendale Recharge Ponds, 31 October; Lake Pleasant, 9 to 23 November; and Canyon Lake, 21 November. At different parts of Lake Havasu, Mohave County, 6 were reported at Cattail Cove State Park (SP), 19 November, and 2 farther north at the lake on 28 November.

Only 2 Ruddy Ground Doves (*Columbina talpacoti*) were reported in 2 counties—1 each at Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area (WA), Cochise County, 30 September, and Desert Breeze Park, Chandler, Maricopa County, 2 November. This number is far fewer than reported in recent falls: 22 in 5 counties (2024), 73 in 8 counties (2023), 14 in 4 counties (2022), and 11 in 6 counties (2021; Jenness 2025). A Buff-collared Nightjar (*Antrostomus ridgwayi*) lingered at Box Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains, Pima County, until 12 August.

One of the few Black Swifts (*Cypseloides niger*) to be photographed in the state was at the Anza Trail at Tubac, Santa Cruz County, 27 September. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), photographed at Boyce Thompson Arboretum (BTA) in September, was reported on the Discord Arizona Rare Birds site. If it is submitted and accepted by the ABC, it will be the first record for Pinal County and the eighth for the state. Amazingly, 2 more Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were reported from Cochise County—1 seen by many observers at Ash Canyon Bird Sanctuary, Cochise County, 6 to 26 October, and another individual photographed at a private residence on 3 October. If accepted by the ABC, these will be the ninth and tenth state records (Rosenberg and Rademaker 2021) of this species. A Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) continued at Madera Canyon, Santa Cruz County, through 27 August. Another continued from summer at the Southwestern Research Station at Cave Creek, Cochise County, until 29 August. Up to 2 continued from summer to 13 September at Ramsey Canyon Preserve, Cochise County.

Three adult Purple Gallinules (*Porphyrio martinica*) were reported from 3 counties. One was at the San Pedro Golf Course in Benson, Cochise County, 7 to 25 August; a second was at Danny Lopez Park, Tucson, 13 August to 15 September; and the third was at the Salt River Project ponds in Phoenix, Maricopa County, 26 August-30 September.

One American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) was reported at Paloma Ranch, Maricopa County, on 28 September. An early Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*) was reported at Lake Cochise, Wilcox, on 25 September. In recent years there have been few reports of this species before October. Thirty-one Snowy Plovers (*Anarhynchus nivosus*) in 9 counties was a 19-year high (Table 1). The Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) is a rare transient reported mostly in the spring. One was at a dairy near Maricopa, Pinal County, 20 to 24 August. The same dairy featured 2 other fall highlights: a Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) on 7 September and a Curlew Sandpiper (*C. ferruginea*) from 20 to 23 August (Figure 3). If accepted by the ABC, the Red Knot will be the fifth record for Pinal County, and the Curlew Sandpiper will be the second for the state and the first for Pinal County. Two late Baird's Sandpipers (*C. bairdii*), a common migrant in late summer and early fall, were reported from Cochise Lake in Willcox, Cochise County on 13 November, and Indian Route 2, between Leupp and Winslow, Coconino County, on 15 November. This sandpiper is casual at this date, with fewer than 15 previous November reports for the state. Regular fall migrants, typically in small numbers, included 8 Sanderlings (*C. alba*) in 6 counties, 16 Semipalmated Sandpipers (*C. pusilla*) from 8 counties, and 2 Red Phalaropes (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) in 1 county (Figure 4, Table 1).



Figure 3. Curlew Sandpiper. Maricopa, Pinal County, 22 August 2025. James Hoagland

Table 1: Fall Numbers of 4 Shorebirds-- 2007-2025

Year	Snowy Plover No.	Sanderling No.	Semipalmated Sandpiper No.	Red Phalarope No.
2007	Several	1	12	1
2008	2	4	9	0
2009	2	14	22	1
2010	8	7	11	1
2011	7	18	12	2
2012	2	15	9	0
2013	9	3	8	3
2014	4	6	8	0
2015	12	8	10	1
2016	5	13	19	0
2017	4	12	17	1
2018	13	10	17	3
2019	10	10	15	3
2020	11	15	11	6
2021	10	29	18	0
2022	5	4	10	0
2023	7	8	10	3
2024	10	12	10	5
2025	31	8	16	2
Ave.	8.4	10.4	12.8	1.7

Source: NAB 2007-2013; eBird 2025

A Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) was reported at Paloma Ranch on 10 August. A Heermann's Gull (*Larus heermanni*) was at Lake Pleasant on 26 August. Three Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*L. fuscus*) were reported at Lake Cochise on 7 October. A Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*), casual in the fall, was at Lake Havasu, Mohave County, on 1 September. A report of an Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), accidental in the state and photographed at Patagonia Lake on 17 September, is being reviewed by the ABC. If accepted, it would represent only the thirteenth record for Arizona. The biggest surprise was a Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*) at Roosevelt Lake on 21 November. If accepted by the ABC, it will be the fourth record for the state and the first for Gila County.



Figure 4. Red Phalarope. Gila Bend sewage ponds, Maricopa County, 1 October 2025. Photo by Dave Stejskal

A Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) was reported at Lake Pleasant, 11 November. Eight Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) were scattered throughout 5 counties. One was in Mohave County at Lake Havasu NWR on 17 August. Another was at Lake Martinez, Yuma County, on 20 August, and likely a different bird was observed on 17 October. One reported at Paloma Ranch on the morning of 24 August was likely the same bird reported at the Ajo sewage ponds, Pima County, later in the day. Two were at Mittry Lake on 28 September and another was at Laguna Dam on the same day, all in Yuma County. One was at San Carlos Lake, Gila County, on 23 October.

Reddish Egrets (*Egretta rufescens*) breed along the shores of the Sea of Cortez in Mexico, and a few immature birds occasionally wander north into Arizona in the late summer and fall. Three were reported this fall—1 at the Gilbert Water Ranch, Maricopa County, on 13 August; 1 at Spot Road Farm, Yuma County, 5 September; and 1 at Paloma Ranch, 19 to 23 October. A White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) was reported at Havasu NWR, Mohave County, on 17 August and again on 4 October. Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*) were reported from 2 counties—1 at Mexican Lake, Navajo County, 18 to 25 August, and a group of 7 in Yuma, 15 September.

A rare melanistic Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) that wintered at the Sierra Vista Environmental Operations Park (EOP), Cochise County, for the past 2 winters (Tracey 2025), returned this fall on 19 October. There was a good showing of Red-shouldered Hawks (*Buteo lineatus*) away from the Hassayampa River Preserve, Maricopa County, as well as in Yuma, where they are known to nest. Reports were of 1 each at Spot Road Farm, 9 September; Tusayan, Coconino County, 26 September; Page, Coconino County, 12 October; Gilbert Water Ranch, 13 to 14 October; Pasture Canyon, Coconino County, 15 October; Lake Havasu City, Mohave County, 18 October; the area around the confluence of the Salt and Gila rivers, Maricopa County, 21 October into December; Arivaca Lake, Pima County, 9 November into December; and Cibola NWR, 25 November into December. The Broad-winged Hawk (*B. platypterus*) is a rare fall migrant in most parts of the state. A total of 62 were reported in 6 counties, with 49 counted during the annual August to November hawkwatch at Yaki Point, Grand Canyon National Park, Coconino County (HawkCount 2025).

A Short-tailed Hawk (*B. brachyurus*) at Mount Lemmon, Pima County, continued from the summer season until 22 September. Another continued at Ladybug Saddle in the Pinaleno Mountains, Graham County, to 12 August. Maricopa County got its fourth record with a sighting at Veteran's Oasis Park, Chandler, 28 November, where it remained in the area through mid-December. Rough-legged Hawk (*B. lagopus*), a rare and irregular winter visitor, was reported at 6 locations—Grand Canyon, South Rim, Coconino County, 31 October; Mormon Lake, Coconino County, 2 November into December; near Nutrioso, Apache County, 3 November; Prescott, Yavapai County, 3 November into December; near Sunrise Park, Apache County, 28 November; and San Rafael Valley, Santa Cruz County, 30 November into December. One Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*) lingered to 3 October at Cave Creek near Portal, Cochise County.

Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) is well known for its movements into the lowlands in the fall and winter (Rosenberg et al. 1991, Wise-Gervais 2005), and extraordinary numbers were reported south of its Arizona breeding range in northern Arizona in the fall of 2025. At least 53 were reported from 10 counties, with a remarkable 9 together at Fain Park in Prescott Valley, Yavapai County, on 20 September. The highest county numbers were in Maricopa (14), Pima (12), and Yavapai (12). An unprecedentedly early individual was observed at the Sierra Vista EOP on 31 August. For comparison, Lewis's Woodpecker fall numbers were 8 in 3 counties in 2023 and 3 in 3 counties in 2024. More Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) were reported in lowland parks and yards in southern Arizona than is typical in the fall. Another woodpecker with an impressive showing was Williamson's Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*). This species primarily nests in coniferous forests with Quaking Aspens (*Populus tremuloides*) above 2,100 m and from the Mogollon Rim north (Latta and Corman 2005). Many move to southern Arizona in the winter, including to southern sky islands, but also to lowlands, particularly where there are patches of conifers. At least 66 were reported, with 6 reports of 2 or more together. The highest numbers were Pima (27) and Cochise (19) counties. This was significantly more than the previous 2 fall seasons. In 2023, the total was 27 with the highest number in Cochise County (12). In 2024, only 23 were reported with a high of 7 in Cochise County. There were no reports of more than 1 in either of those years. Surprisingly, however, for the first fall since 2007, no Red-breasted Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) were reported in the state. Most years a few individuals of this species from California and the Pacific Northwest are reported in the fall

season. Reports in recent years were: 2024 (5 in 3 counties), 2023 (9 in 4 counties), 2022 (4 in 3 counties), and 2021 (4 in 3 counties). The movement of some woodpecker species is likely driven by food shortages, including acorns, associated with drought conditions over the past couple of years (ADWR 2025).

Two Crested Caracaras (*Caracara plancus*) were reported in locations where they are not typically expected: Lower San Pedro River WA, Pinal County, 3 October; and Baseline Road and Salome Highway, Maricopa County, 27 November.

A Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) photographed and sound-recorded at the St. John's WTP, Apache County, 10 October, was unexpected at this northern location and represents only the second record for the county; the first was in June 2025. The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*T. forficatus*) is a casual visitor to the state. One was reported at Nugget Canyon on the north side of the Santa Catalina Mountains, Pinal County, on 7 September. Four White-eyed Vireos (*Vireo griseus*) were reported, 1 in Tubac, Santa Cruz County, continuing from the summer until 11 August. The second was at the Base and Meridian WA, Maricopa County, 27 August to 24 September. The third was reported from the Salt River Recreation Area near Granite Reef Dam, 4 to 6 September. The final report was from Tumacácori, Santa Cruz County, on 23 November. Yellow-throated Vireos (*V. flavifrons*) were reported from Ruby Road, Santa Cruz County, on 21 September; and the Base Meridian WA, 21 November through December. A Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*) was reported near Tsaille Lake, Apache County, on 4 November.

In the late fall and winter, typically high-elevation Steller's Jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*; Figure 5), which breed in mountain coniferous forests, descend in small numbers to lower elevation oak-juniper habitat. In some years, however, the influx of this jay can be into lower areas, even into desert habitat and in great numbers (Phillips et al. 1964, Rosenberg et al. 1991). The last such irruption in Arizona was in the fall and winter 2021-2022 (Jenness 2022). This fall, another such irruption occurred with scores of reports from yards, parks, and many other locations in urban and suburban areas, especially in Maricopa, Pinal, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise counties. This jay irruption also included the midelevation Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*), which was found in many of the same lowland locations, as well as in agricultural areas. Remarkably, Mexican Jays (*A. wollweberi*), which are rarely seen in the lowlands, also joined the downward movement. They were especially reported throughout the Tucson area, including in groups. Large irruptive movements of jays after the breeding season in response to food shortages can occur over large geographic areas and in years when other corvid species also irrupt (Monson and Phillips 1964, Rosenberg et al. 1991)



Figure 5. Steller's Jay. Peppersauce Canyon, Pinal County, 22 October 2025. Photo by Doug Jenness

Another high-elevation bird that made a significant showing in the lowlands, particularly in Maricopa, Pima, Gila, and Pinal counties, was the Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*). In some locations, observers reported up to 3 foraging together. A Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*) was photographed at Silverbell Lake in Tucson, 21 November. If accepted by the ABC, it will be the fourteenth state record. The Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*) breeds in coniferous forests (Spence 2005) and rarely shows up in low elevations. One reported by many observers at BTA, from 1 November into the winter season, is only the third known record for Pinal County. Another high-elevation species that may wander into the lowlands in the fall and winter is the Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*). This fall, it was reported in at least 30 low-elevation locations in 8 counties. Particularly, noteworthy were 6 at Hassayampa River Preserve on 2 November. The number was higher than usual at lowland locations: in comparison, there were 10 in 5 counties in 2022, 16 in 4 counties in 2023, and 8 in 3 counties in 2024.

This fall there were 5 reports of Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) and 7 of Winter Wren (*T. hiemalis*). A Pacific Wren was reported at Oak Creek Canyon, Coconino County, on 4 August, where nesting likely occurs (Corman 2005). Three were at this location on 8 November. Another was reported in Coconino County north of Flagstaff at Weatherford Canyon on 20 October. Reports were also at Aravaipa Creek Road, Pinal County, 31 October; Hassayampa River Preserve, 1 November into December; and Camp Creek, Maricopa County, 22 November into December. Reports of Winter Wren included Hassayampa River Preserve, 26 October into winter; Paton Center in Patagonia, 27 to 30 October; Patagonia Lake SP, 15 to 28 November; Madera Canyon, Santa Cruz County, 17 November; Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, Pinal County, 17 November; 1 each at 2 locations along the Salt River, Maricopa County, 23 November; and Box Bar Recreation Site, Maricopa County, 24 November into winter.



Figure 6. Varied Thrush. Hassayampa River Preserve, 30 October 2025. Photo by Pierre Deviche

As usual in the fall-winter period, a few Townsend's Solitaires (*Myadestes townsendi*) moved into the lowlands. Most notable were 2 in far western Pima County—1 each at Organ Pipe Cactus NM, 17 October, and Ajo, 24 October. A Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) was in the Mt. Wrightson Picnic Area, Madera Canyon, 8 October. Six Rufous-backed Robins (*Turdus rufopalliatu*s) in 3 counties was substantially fewer than the 19-year high of 36 in the fall of 2024. However, the 11 Varied Thrushes (*Ixoreus naevius*; Figure 6) reported from 5 counties was the highest number in 19 years (Table 2).

Two Sprague's Pipits (*Anthus spragueii*) at Lonesome Valley near Prescott on 1 November were farther north in the state than usual for this species in the fall and winter. A Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) was reported in the Chuska Mountains in Apache County on 2 November. Two reports of Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus*) of the western subspecies (*H. p. californicus*) were from Yavapai County, where they appear to be regular—up to 6 at Aspen Springs, 1 to 29 November, and up to 3 at Granite Basin Lake, 5 November into December. Lawrence's Goldfinch (*Spinus lawrencei*) is an erratic visitor from California, primarily between October and May, with many birds in irruptive years and only a few in other years (Small 1994, Corman and Rademaker 2005). The fall of 2025 saw one of the larger movements into the state with hundreds of birds reported from 12 counties, the most since 2021. From a yard in Patagonia early in the morning of 14 October, 128 were counted flying over in 1 hour. There were dozens of Lawrence's Goldfinches at many locations in the fall of 2024, but only 12 were reported from 3 counties in the fall of 2023, showing the considerable variance in their appearance in the state.

Table 2. Rufous-backed Robin and Varied Thrush Numbers, Fall 2007-2025

Year	RBRO No.	VATH No.
2007	3	1
2008	1	7
2009	12	8
2010	4	7
2011	10	6
2012	7	6
2013	3	2
2014	4	4
2015	5	1
2016	5	2
2017	28	9
2018	1	4
2019	2	7
2020	31	9
2021	14	3
2022	4	3
2023	14	8
2024	36	4
2025	6	11
Ave.	10.0	5.4

Source: NAB 2007-2013, eBird 2025

A Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) of the red (*iliaca*) group was found at Patagonia Lake SP on 27 October. Two Yellow-breasted Chats (*Icteria virens*) lingered into November, both in Cochise County—1 at Ramsey Canyon, 10 November, and 1 at the San Pedro RNCA, 15 November. The report of a Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), at Vista Canyon Park near Phoenix, from 31 August to 3 September, is being reviewed by the ABC (Figure 7). A Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*), first reported at Hassayampa Preserve in July, continued to 1 August. Two Common Grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*) were photographed along Bourdon Ranch Road, Navajo County, 7 November.

During the fall, 32 wood warbler species were reported, the lowest number since 2021. The 19-year mean is 33.9.

One Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) was reported at the University of Arizona in Tucson, 22 October. Three Louisiana Waterthrushes (*Parkesia motacilla*) were reported. They were at San Simon, Cochise County, 10 August; the San Pedro RNCA, 27 August into December; and Black River, Gila County, 13 September. Sightings of Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) were 1 at Ramsey Canyon, 21 August to 11 September; 1 at Page Springs Hatchery, Yavapai County, 21 to 23 September; 2 at Gilbert Water Ranch, 13 to 24 October; and 1 at San Bernardino NWR, Cochise County, 22 October. The Cape May Warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*) reported from a yard in Florence, 26 September, will be the fifth record for Pinal County if accepted by the ABC. Magnolia Warblers (*S. magnolia*) were reported from 3 counties: Stone Creek Golf Club, Phoenix, 26 September; Spot Road Farm, 27 September; Jacob Lake, Coconino County, 18 October; and at least 1 and possibly 2 at the Salt River Recreation Area, 8-17 November. Two Blackburnian Warblers (*S. fusca*) included 1 each at Watson's Lake, 4 to 12 October, and Tanque Verde Wash in Tucson, 27 November. Black-throated Blue Warblers (*S. caeruleascens*) were reported at 3 locations: Box Bar Recreation Site, Verde River, Maricopa County, 18 to 21 October; Summerhaven, Mt. Lemmon, 6 to 19 November; and Ramsey Canyon, 7 to 10 November. Yellow-throated Warblers (*S. dominica*) were reported from Upper Eagle Creek Road, Greenlee County, 18 August, and along the Salt River in Phoenix, 29 September to 15 October. A Prairie Warbler (*S. discolor*) was reported at Arthur Pack Regional Park, Marana, on 31 August. Up to 2 Rufous-capped Warblers (*Basileuterus rufifrons*; Figure 8) continued from the summer into December at Sycamore Canyon, Santa Cruz County.

Three Scarlet Tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*) were reported, including 1 each at Lake Montezuma, Yavapai County, 5 October; Hassayampa River Preserve, 24 October; and Desert Springs Golf Course, Sun City, 25 to 26 November. A pair of Flame-colored Tanagers (*Piranga bidentata*) lingered in Miller Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, until 8 August.

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Figure 7. Bobolink. Vista Canyon Park, Maricopa County, 3 September 2025. Photo by Ryan O'Donnell

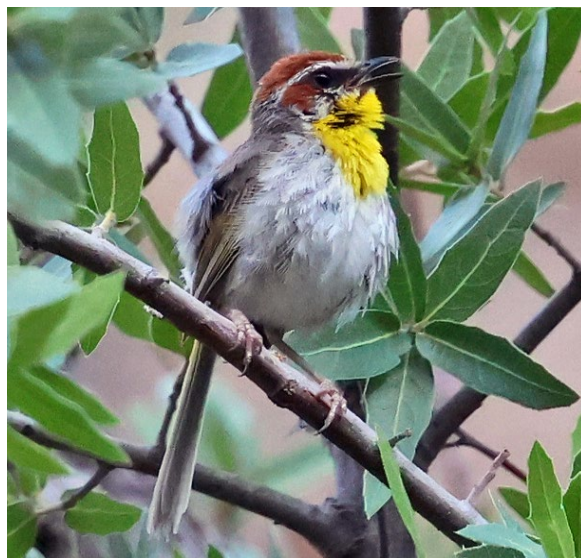


Figure 8. Rufous-capped Warbler. Sycamore Canyon, Santa Cruz County, 4 August 2025. Photo by Richard Fray

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